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Photo: Dave Trampore



*Marvin Musquin
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WorldSBK

Looking ahead...

Chaz Davies might have found another excellent weekend performance submerging into a green pool of attention but complete ownership of three straight rounds of WorldSBK (five doubles for the year, eleven races in total) has definitely not gone unnoticed. Fans of the Welshman and the Italian brand can only wish the 29 year old keeps his fingers fiery until February 2017 and he can put his eyes on the prize once again

Photo by Ducati Corse Press







O MX

Return to arms...

Throwback to 2012 and the last time that Shaun Simpson (left) and Arnaud Tonus (centre, with Husqvarna's Zach Osborne completing the trio for the Dixon squad) teamed up in Yamaha colours. The Scotsman and Swiss will be taking on MXGP in Wilvo 'blue' for 2017 after the recent announcement for Yamaha Motor Europe's official satellite team

Photo by Ray Archer







MotoGP

Onboard with...

Finely poised: a gaze-drawing shot by CormacGP of Jorge Lorenzo from a dry session at Sepang last weekend and a chance to appreciate the positioning and balancing act demanding by a MotoGP machine almost hitting full lean. The Spaniard continued his positive run in Malaysia but saw his teammate take home second place in the 2016 championship

Photo by CormacGP





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MotoGP

SHELL MALAYSIA MOTORCYCLE

SEPANG · OCTOBER 30th · Rnd 17 of 18

MotoGP winner: Andrea Dovizioso, Ducati

Moto2 winner: Johann Zarco, Kalex

Moto3 winner: Peco Bagnaia, Mahindra



'Don't try that next year...'
Jorge Lorenzo gets more assurances from Ducati's potential in the rain as Dovi takes his second career MotoGP win

SEVENTEEN ROUNDS – ANOTHER WET ONE – AND NINE DIFFERENT WINNERS. EVEN THOUGH MARC MARQUEZ WRAPPED THINGS UP WITH THREE RACES TO GO THERE IS A 'VINTAGE' FEELING ABOUT THE 2016 MOTOGP SEASON. ANDREA DOVIZIOSO GAVE DUCATI THEIR SECOND SUCCESS OF THE YEAR AND LONG OVERDUE FOR THE ITALIAN WHO HAD BEEN IN SEVERAL PROMISING POSITIONS EARLIER IN THE SEASON ONLY FOR MISFORTUNE (OR ANOTHER RIDER) STRIKING. CREDIT TO JOHANN ZARCO FOR BECOMING THE FIRST EVER BACK-TO-BACK MOTO2 CHAMP AND PECO BAGNAIA SOMEHOW SURVIVED A HECTIC MOTO3 GRAND PRIX

Photos by CormacGP
Blogs by Neil Morrison/David Emmett



Famous last words? Much was made of the mature and smart way the world champion waded through the difficulty of 2016 but the statement that the 'old Marc' might come out after Moteigi led to race crashes in Australia and also in Malaysia while potentially adding to his win/podium tally...









Through the gloom. Jorge Lorenzo banished some of the rain-Michelin bad vibes with a fortuitous podium run at Sepang. The 2015 World Champ now has to take care of his replacement on the works Yamaha for 2017 at Valencia to ensure third spot in the championship and maintain his record of top three finishes for the last seven years in the premier class





MotoGP MAL



UPWARD RISE OF THE BLUE...

By Neil Morrison

Andrea Dovizioso's ride away from Valentino Rossi in the closing laps of a blistering wet weather race deserves high praise. As does Dovizioso personally, who, to a degree, was able to lay to rest the heart-wrenching disappointment of watching team-mate Andrea Iannone end Ducati's 100-race winless streak from a few metres back in Austria.

Yet not for the first time on a Sunday evening I was pondering a series of 'What ifs...' A pointless exercise for the most part, but one that occasionally offers a fresh perspective of a race weekend that a results sheet does not. So what if, against all odds, the rain clouds that form over Sepang on a daily basis had stayed away a few extra hours?

It's entirely possible that we would all be writing about Maverick Viñales, and the celebration of three consecutive podium appearances from a Suzuki rider, something not seen since the Spring of 2000. That thought came after watching the smiling, animated 21-year old in his post-race debrief.

Speaking lucidly after the race, in which he placed a disappointing sixth, Viñales glowed when detailing his feeling with the rapidly improving GSX-RR in the dry. "I feel really good on the bike. I feel now we are one. Now the bike is the best we've had. In warm-up II was using just one metre of line because the rest was wet. It was so good, I felt like I was on fire."

His comments echo those made by team-mate Aleix Espargaro on Thursday: "Suzuki is a big brand but I think they've never had a bike like this in the history of MotoGP. It's quite close to Yamaha and Honda."

That Suzuki can boast freely of a competitive package this year is by no means a revelation. But results at Aragon, Japan, Australia and then free practice pace in Malaysia suggest Espargaro is right. Suzuki can now go to any track and justifiably feel a podium – if not more – is possible. When could the Hamamatsu factory last make such claims? 2007 perhaps, the best season of John Hopkins' career. If not then, you'd be going back 16 years and that last rider's world title.

Thanks to a much-improved engine and a seamless gearbox, the GSX-RR has been a more-than-capable motorcycle from the first round in Qatar. But now, it appears the machine is working brilliantly when braking, with both riders able to turn-in as they want. Traction and acceleration has improved also. Pol Espargaro marveled at the ease at which his elder brother and Viñales accelerated away from him out of Phillip Island's two low-gear corners. Even Jorge Lorenzo pointed at Suzuki's development with electronics to underline Yamaha's own stunted improvements in that area.

Wet weather set-up is still lacking, as the dash in Sepang proved. But other weakness – chiefly pace in the race's second half and performing in hot conditions – has been a point of tireless thought and development in recent months. Just look at Viñales' pace as the Grands Prix in Motegi and Phillip Island drew to a close.

The machine aside, it's clear from speaking to everyone - from riders to crew chiefs and press officers - involved in the project that a dynamic atmosphere within the team plays a part. At Misano Viñales confided his agonising move to Yamaha was prolonged because he attempted to convince his current crew to move across. "I was trying for sure to bring everyone to Yamaha. Everyone."



Not one person will move though, showing not only the good feeling that exists within the team, but the belief in the project going into 2017. “For us the fact that the crew decided to remain here was a big award, was a great satisfaction also for me, for my job,” said Brivio in Sepang.

“Aware that complacency cannot set in, Suzuki management have identified a clear development direction going into 2017...”

Aware that complacency cannot set in, the Suzuki management has identified a clear development direction going into 2017. A slightly modified chassis and swingarm may be forthcoming, “something that makes the tyres working better or lasting more,” according to Brivio. And of course, continued tinkering with the spec electronics software.

A shame then that the current line up leaves for pastures new on the Sunday evening at Valencia. But, consider Andrea Iannone's form before a fractured vertebrae in Misano put him out of four races, and there is little reason to believe Suzuki won't maintain at least some of the momentum gathered in recent months.

Is there any wonder the Italian delayed a return from injury in spite of Ducati's frustrations to set aside any risk of competing at Phillip Island to be in the best possible shape for the Valencia test? From the disappointment at being dropped from

Ducati's factory line-up to this. The fast but volatile Italian must now be relishing the chance to lead Suzuki further along the path toward the top. How Iannone – and to a certain extent Alex Rins – go on the GSX-RR next year will be just one of 2017's rich tapestry of sub-plots. Should Suzuki maintain the upward trajectory that has marked them out as serious players then the variety on offer this season may not be a one off.





12 MotoGP podiums from 16 Sepang races for Rossi who also bagged the runner-up ranking in the championship for the third successive year. A penultimate run on the Ducati for Eugene Laverty (right) who has only a matter of weeks before thinking about his first WorldSBK Aprilia test



Rubber, software and rain: three ingredients that mean it has been hard to pick a victor from this lot for most of the season





ARRIVING TO 9: THE PERFECT STORM

By David Emmett

And Dovi makes it nine. When Andrea Dovizioso's Ducati Desmosedici GP crossed the line to take victory at Sepang, the 2016 MotoGP season entered the record books. For the first time in Grand Prix history, nine different people had won races in a single season. Dani Pedrosa's success at Misano had tied the previous record, the 2000 season seeing eight different riders all prevail in the same year. But a ninth winner is unprecedented.

Where did this wild year come from? There are a lot of reasons. New tyres, of course, some riders adapting better to the Michelins than others, and teams learning more about how to get the best out of them at every race. New electronics too, with Magneti Marelli supplying software for their spec hardware, putting all of the MotoGP factories at the same level, taking away the advantage which Honda and Yamaha had over the rest. And a competitive field, of course: we have never seen this depth of talent in terms of both riders and bikes before.

But perhaps this whole wild and wonderful season has its roots elsewhere, a year ago and half a world away. Perhaps the 2016 season started two years ago, in the Eastern Pacific. The upwelling of cold water that feeds the western coast of South America weakened, and the warm surface water from the Western Pacific spread eastwards. That signalled the start of a weather phenomenon called El Niño, which brings drastic changes to the weather in large parts of Asia, and South and Central America. The 2014 El Niño was one of the most powerful in recent history, lasting through to the start of 2016.

It isn't just the Pacific affected by El Niño. The changing trade winds and higher ocean surface temperatures slowly, and gradually have knock on effects all over the world. With a delay of a year or so, weather patterns in Europe shifted, the high

pressure systems coming from the huge landmass of Russia and Eurasia lessening in importance. The weather in Europe – and especially the parts of Europe where they race motorcycles – is sometimes cooler than normal, and often wetter.

Colder and wetter is exactly what we have seen in MotoGP this season, and in combination with the other factors, has made for a fascinating term. Michelin, after all, did their first batch of development in 2014, when Kenny Noyes tested their slicks in Europe with the Kawasaki ZX-10R that he would use to go on and win the Spanish CEV Superbike championship. Factory test riders from Honda, Yamaha and Ducati started testing the Michelins later that year, and throughout 2015, they tested at almost every circuit on the MotoGP calendar, either before or after the race there. That data gave Michelin a baseline to start to build their tyres with. It was their starting point for the 2016 season.

The trouble is, the weather in 2015 was fairly typical, a warm, mostly dry summer in Europe. The real effects of El Niño in this part of the world didn't hit until 2016. So several times this year, Michelin found themselves at a track where the temperatures and conditions were not what they had expected. The problems started in Argentina, where it was much warmer, with track temperatures 20°C hotter than last year. The combination of heat and a dirty track stressed the tyres, and caused Michelin to rethink their designs. Back in Europe, conditions were often colder than expected, meaning the harder compounds Michelin had brought were not working the way the riders had anticipated.

And of course there was the rain. We had a lot of wet races. It was damp in Argentina, then absolutely soaking at Assen. Both Sachsenring and



Brno started out wet, the track drying out during the race. Sometimes it just rained during practice, leaving the riders with no idea of a dry set up, such as happened at Phillip Island [Red Bull Ring was a narrow escape! – ED]. Teams were left to make their best guess at a set up, and then cross their fingers for the race.

“Perhaps this wild and wonderful season has its roots elsewhere, a year ago and half a world away...”

All of this provided a thrilling combination. New electronics meant that the teams had to spend a long time trying to figure out how to use them best, and trying to establish a base set up which would provide a starting point for each weekend. New tyres meant that the teams had to try to figure out the right weight distribution between front and rear, to provide the best rear grip for drive out of corners and the best front grip for corner entry and carrying corner speed. They had to try to understand how the Michelins behaved over race distance, how quickly they would show signs of degradation, and how best to manage that with only two different traction control settings and a couple of engine braking settings. Riders had to unlearn old habits picked up from racing Bridgestones, and try to learn new habits that would work with the Michelins. The historical set up advantages of the established factories were gone.

There are also more bikes capable of being competitive on the grid. In years past, only the factory Hondas and Yamahas were in contention,

and Casey Stoner on the Ducati. But since Gigi Dall'Igna has taken over, the Ducati is a very solid all round bike, and they have gained an advantage using winglets to compensate for the loss of electronics. Suzuki have made massive steps forward with their 2016 bike, and it is not far off where the Yamaha and Honda are. Even Aprilia has made real progress though this season, though they still lag significantly behind the other four.

All of these factors take nothing away from the athletes who have won. Every single one of them has proven themselves in the heat of battle. Of the nine winners of a MotoGP race this season, all but Andrea Iannone and Jack Miller have not won a world championship (Cal Crutchlow, of course, was World Supersport champion in 2009). Miller was runner up to Alex Márquez in Moto3 in 2014, and Iannone finished third in Moto2 in all three years he was in the class. All but Cal Crutchlow had won races in Grand Prix before, though Miller, Iannone and Viñales had only won in Moto3 and Moto2. These are all top flight riders, the best in the world.

2016 demonstrates what can happen when you put a hugely talented field on competitive bikes, and have them race together with relatively little set up data and in unpredictable conditions. Any number of riders can conquer, which is fantastic for the sport. But a repeat of 2016 is unlikely in the future. Next year, the factories will have much more data, the tyre designs will be much more stable, and the weather is likely to return to normal, giving the teams much more set up time. Thankfully, what remains are a field full of talented riders on bikes that are all pretty well matched. We may not see nine winners in a season again but it's a given that at the start of every race next season there will be six or seven riders capable of winning it. This is truly a golden age of MotoGP.



Broken bits for Cal after a qualification get-off in Malaysia. Even in the rain the Honda man could not venture too close to the 39 year old record of being the first British back-to-back winner in the premier class. His Turn 2 crash was at one of the slowest points on the track but the landing was pretty heavy





MotoGP MAL



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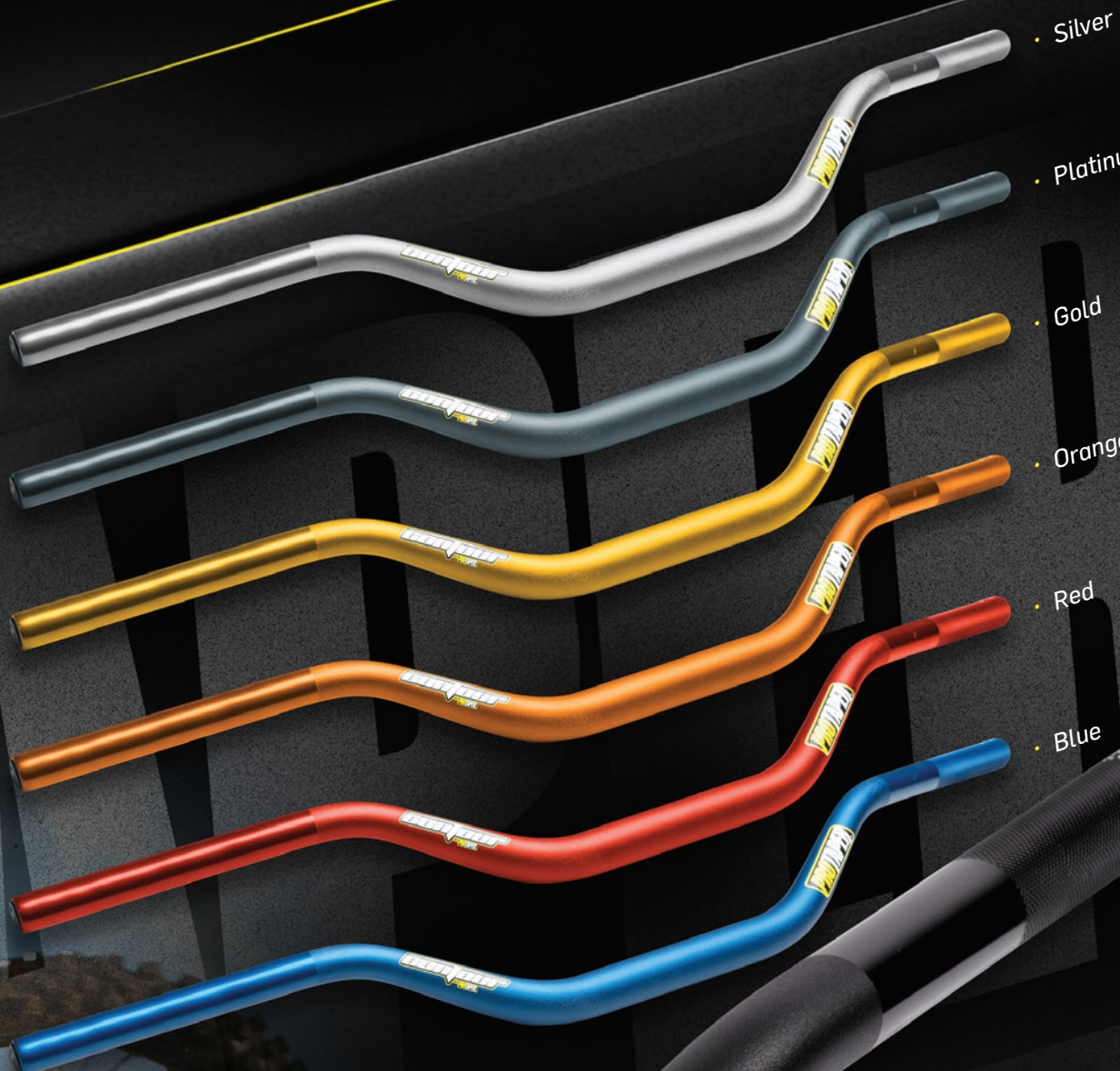
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Race one winner: Chaz Davies, Ducati

Race two winner: Chaz Davies, Ducati

CHAMPIONSHIP CONFIRMATION,
ANOTHER SIZZLING DAVIES DOUBLE
WITH THE DUKE AND A 'GIFT'
FOR SECOND IN THE STANDINGS:
WORLDSBK CARRIED MORE THAN
ITS FAIR SHARE OF NARRATIVES AT
LOSAIL, QATAR FOR THE THIRTEENTH
AND FINAL OUTING OF 2016.
JONATHAN REA MADE HISTORY FOR
KAWASAKI AND HIS PERSONAL CV
WITH BACK-TO-BACK TITLES AND
DAVIES CANNOT HAVE POSSIBLY
DONE MORE TO FIRE MULTIPLE
WARNING SHOTS FOR 2017...



SBK QAT

THE STORIES

Blog by Graeme Brown
Photos by Kawasaki/GeeBee/
Ducati Corse/Honda/Milagro






Davies has been simply superb since mid-season on the works Ducati. Three clean sheets was the standout dominant spell of 2016







Such is his consistency and competitiveness (and forged in 2016 with a new bike to worry about) that Rea must be considered as one of the best and fastest motorcycle racers in the world. For good reason his achievement in Qatar brought wide-ranging acknowledgements from MotoGP further east





Approaching the decisive moment in the second race where Rea would gift second on the day and for the year to his teammate; Sykes soaking up the karma after his 2014 experience with Loris Baz and controversially losing the crown







Another championship double with Kenan Sofuoglu in World Supersport triumphant ensured a stellar year for Kawasaki (left). Nicky Hayden ended a first SBK year with a win and the hopes of more potential from the new Fireblade (top, left). Yamaha meanwhile saw Sylvain Guintoli excel around one of his preferred circuits to obtain the new-generation R1's first silverware (top)

THE SUN HAS GONE DOWN...AND COME STRAIGHT BACK UP AGAIN!

By Graeme Brown

It is a strange feeling, and I must say a little depressing, to be leaving the press office as the sun is coming up. Dorna arranged to have the WorldSBK Championship Awards straight after race two on Sunday night and it was gone midnight before I, along with the other photographers, got back to the press office to start editing the day's work.

The sun had set on the 2016 WorldSBK season a few hours earlier with the last day bringing up more talking points than anyone had previously expected.

As predicted Jonathan Rea wrapped up the rider's title in race one of the weekend the previous evening and as suspected Chaz Davies continued his impressive run of double wins. However, it was JR's gesture in the second race, to slow and let team-mate Tom Sykes pass on the last lap to retain second in the championship, that got the tongues wagging in the paddock and on social media.

It raised the issue of team orders again and the Ducatisti on Facebook and Twitter were at boiling point claiming Rea and Kawasaki were disrespectful to use team orders to deny Chaz Davies second spot in the final standings.

Rea was quite vocal in the press conference and in interviews that he made the decision himself on the last lap. Having spoken to him on Saturday night I know personally how determined he was to win race 2 on Sunday. He wanted to end Davies' streak and not let him tally the most wins for the season. As he said

in the media it was on the last lap of the shortened race that he realised he wasn't going to win and in that moment the thought came to him to help Sykes. If Rea had won, with Davies in second and Sykes in third, then the overall result would have been the same with Sykes on 443 points to Davies' 440.

Like it or loathe the gesture, what it did do is get people talking. Many, including myself, have said that any competition needs is a bit of controversy to get people engaged. It gives us a few questions to ponder over the winter and hopefully heighten anticipation for 2017.

Dorna themselves are certainly doing all they can to raise the interest level and it was nice to see the little video piece they posted of Marquez, Rossi, Redding and Smith all congratulating Rea from the MotoGP paddock in Malaysia. They are clearly trying to get more of the MotoGP fans to engage with Superbike, something completely unheard of five or ten years ago.

To use footballing parlance it has been a game of two halves. Kawasaki and Rea done the damage in the first half of the season and despite the second onslaught from the team in the red shirts, all the spoils went the way of the boys in green.

What of Davies however? Where did this winning blaze come from? At the FIM Awards ceremony immediately after the race on Sunday he lamented the fact that he had won 11 races, ten of which came through back to back wins,



but there he was, third in the Championship. I have a degree of sympathy for him but his early season misfortunes and DNF's ultimately took their toll.

“Like or loathe Rea’s gesture for Sykes, what it did do is get people talking...”

I briefly spoke to his crew chief Alberto Colombo on Sunday morning and he put the change in fortune down to the work they had done in testing in the summer. It is mainly an alteration to chassis set-up that has given Chaz more confidence in the front end that has made the difference. It was reminiscent of the 2002 campaign. Troy Bayliss was utterly dominant on the Ducati that year until, in July, Honda gave Colin Edwards the VTR SP-2 that HRC had developed for the Suzuka 8 hour race. That coincided with Edwards and Honda heading to Clermont-Ferrand for a week-long tyre test with Michelin and the updated bike.

He came back to the championship and won nine of the last 10 races to take the title from Bayliss in the epic head to head weekend at Imola.

As it is Rea, Skyes and Kawasaki have to be complimented on what they have achieved this year with a completely new bike. Rea’s crew chief, Pere Riba, has been keen all along to rebuff suggestions that the 2016 ZX-10R was just a revision of the previous model. As he will tell you, it looks similar, but for a race machine, the engine, chassis and suspension were all completely different from the previous bike and he was immensely proud of what they had achieved.

In a quiet moment Rea conceded that his bike had marginally less power than last year, and Sykes has been vocal about the fact that KRT didn’t test in summer. I would guess that the winter testing that starts in two weeks will be focusing on one thing mainly for the Kawasaki engineers.

For me there is a short two week break before heading to Motorland Aragon and Jerez for those tests. It will be the first time we will see Melandri, Laverty and Bradl on track with the current field, the latter on the new Honda Fireblade, and I am sure it will also raise a few more talking points before the series closes properly for 2016.

As always at the end of another season I have to thank all those manufacturers, teams, sponsors and riders I have worked for and with this year. I know the miserable Scotsman can be a challenge to work with sometimes but it a continued pleasure and privilege to have this job. I have one more post before the winter shutdown but, for now, thanks to all.



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WINTER OF CONTENT...

By Steve Matthes

Not a whole lot going on here in the USA in terms of dirt bike racing now that the Monster Energy Cup has come and gone. We're waiting to see when RCH Suzuki will announce that they have signed Broc Tickle, Justin Bogle and perhaps Dean Wilson.

Boot camps have begun here in the USA for the 2017 Supercross series. Ken Roczen and Adam Cianciarulo are hid away up in the hills of Santa Barbara (right down the road from where Michael Jackson lived!) at Castillo Ranch getting ripped and fast, Aldon Baker's got Ryan Dungey, Jason Anderson, Marvin Musquin and Zach Osborne down in Florida working and grinding away while Chad Reed ran through some testing in Southern California for base-lines and is now back in Florida doing his thing.

James Stewart, Malcolm Stewart: they are still waiting to find out what and where they are racing next year or even IF they are racing. It's a different world out here than just a few years ago, no doubt about it.

Something that IS happening this time of the year is off-season European Supercrosses yet even those are feeling the crunch of these tough economic times. Long time race in Genoa, Italy has been cancelled as has a scheduled SX in Sofia, Bulgaria that I went to last year. So that leaves three big races on the schedule. Lille, France, Geneva, Switzerland and Sydney, Australia. Let's break these down for you yeah?

First up November 11th weekend is Lille, France which for a long time was the famous Bercy race right downtown in the heart of Paris. With renovations happening at the Bercy Arena, the race moved about hour and a half north of Paris. It's a way nicer arena than Bercy, it's a better track than Bercy and it's two nights instead of three.

But it's not Bercy...I'm not sure any race anywhere in the world will be Bercy. If you've never been there then I can't really describe it. The atmosphere, the passion of the fans and the tight racing added up to an amazing event that cannot be duplicated although the same people behind the meeting do a nice job at Lille.

Marvin Musquin, Justin Barcia, Christian Craig, Romain Febvre and Malcolm Stewart are just some of the names scheduled to line up and it will be notable for the fact that Barcia will make his debut on the JGR Suzuki there.

Next up is the Sydney, Australia race that will feature Cooper Webb, Chad Reed and, wait for it, Ryan Villopoto! Yeah, that's right, the four-time 450SX champion is coming out of retirement for this race only to line up against the best there is right now. I've been in touch with RV a bit and he's adamant that he's not going for the win, he's going there to put on a good show and not get hurt. But there are not many riders I've ever been around that are more competitive than Villopoto. Will he beat these guys?

No...but I'm betting he gives them more of a run than we all think.

Joining those three are the Aussie SX regulars like Justin Brayton, Wil Hahn, Dan Reardon and others so it should be a great two nights of action down under. Anytime the #22 shows up at his hometown race, fans get excited although does anyone else think this could be the new #2's race to lose?

The final date in the off-season is the long-standing Geneva race. This is two nights, the floor plan is big so it's more of a USA lap-time race than the other ones. Barcia, Stewart and Musquin will be here along with Brayton, Kyle Chisholm and Arnaud Tonus. This race seems to have the deepest field out of the three and the crowd will be going nuts for Tonus who I've seen ride very well at this event before.

So stay tuned for these three big races and as a rider, if you do well at these then that means everything and if not, well, they mean nothing. You know how that works right? The riders mostly do these races for the extra cash it brings but once that gate drops, things like playing it safe seem to go out the window. I'm interested to see what happens with these riders doing both Lille and Geneva and if there are fireworks from one race to the next.



FUTURE

KISKA'S CRAIG DENT IS AT THE HELM OF THE LOOK, FEEL AND FUNCTION OF KTM'S FRENETIC MOTORCYCLE OUTPUT. WE TRAVELLED TO SALZBURG TO ASK THE BRITISH DESIGNER AND THE MAN BEHIND THE STARTLING 1290 SUPER DUKE HOW HE ARRIVED TO SCULPT SOME OF THE MOST PROVOCATIVE BIKES ON THE MARKET



DESIGNING KTMs: CRAIG DENT

SHAPER

By Adam Wheeler
Photos by KTM/Heiko Mandl

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Love them or hate them KTM's motorcycles certainly force a response before anyone has even had a chance to throw a leg over them. One of the people responsible for the look and feeling behind the provocative appeal of the Austrian bikes is Brit Craig Dent, Lead Designer at the Kiska agency in Salzburg and KTM sculptor extraordinaire both for Street and Off-road and who also has had influence in some of the Husqvarna shapes like the fettled look behind the Vitpilen. OTOR headed to Austria last year to ask the friendly and fiercely intelligent Dent how he got to the point where he can carve the future for a manufacturer...

Kiska is a strange place. All immaculate angles, grey interiors: a cradle of productivity. Around the two floors a wealth of young people radiate intelligence and creativity. This is not only the hub of aestheticism and functionality behind the KTM and Husqvarna brands but also count a number of other clients from Adidas to Zeiss on their roster of innovation and consultancy. On the ground floor and behind dark walls lies the principal design department and clay modelling bay where motorcycles unlikely to make the elevated plinths at the EIC-MA motorcycle show for another few years – or also versions of bikes that might never make it to production – are crafted.

We enter after a 'cover-up' exercise by the staff where large screens tantalisingly obscure some authentic glimpse of what might come to pass. Craig Dent welcomes us over to his design zone; busy, surprisingly cramped and with all the whirring minds of his staff grouped together in a hive of invention.

Kiska is distinctly multi-national. It's a pool of motorcycle aficionados and design experts (maybe even visionaries) that have undoubtedly had a hand in establishing KTM as the biggest bike manufacturer in Europe and with

sales figures primed to hit 200,000 in what could be another record breaking year for the firm an hour up the road in Mattighofen/Munderfing. Dent's piece de la resistance could be the Super Duke 1290 'The Beast' as it was coined and undoubtedly the most delectable and deceptive naked bike in the entire segment. We produced an in-depth look at Dent's effort with The Beast and how KTM have made such an impact with their 'naked' for the company's Unbound magazine. See the article [HERE](#)

But there was also a bigger story. How did a north Londoner arrive to helm such an influential collective in the depths of Austria and how does the relationship work with KTM in order for the ideas to make their way from clay to plastic to production. Dent, fluent in German, a father of two, soon to be three, and clearly enamoured with racing and motorcycling generally is good company and an erudite talker...

Where did the biking obsession come from?

My Dad was a wannabe biker. So we always had magazines lying around at home. We used to go to the Ally Pally bike shows [the now defunct Road Racing and Superbike show at Alexandra Palace in the UK's capital] back then in the early '90s. I remember sitting on the 1993 'tiger' Fireblade with the 'bullet holes' on the front to balance out the air pressure. A super cool thing and that got me hooked. I think my Dad went and bought a Ducati Monster and then I was 'in it'. From the beginning I just sketched and drew pictures of bikes, cars, buses, trains, whatever. It was either that or playing with Matchbox cars!

So drawing become a bit more serious at some point...?

Yeah, things get serious and you go to school and learn about maths, science, geography and history. I was doing alright [in those subjects] but it was definitely design, technology and art

that were more interesting for me and where I had some more flair I guess. In today's society it was a case of 'well, what are you going to do with those skills? Where are you going to go?' and I let myself be influenced that attitude and was thinking 'hmm, physics and maths is what I should be studying' and went all the way through A levels doing that with art on the side to basically keep me happy. When my results came in and they were not as good as I hoped it was a kick up the backside to dedicate myself to the things I was good at. At which point my parents said: "go and study design". I felt like a failure already until they forced me to go to an interview at Coventry University to study transportation design. I didn't think it would work out as I as my maths and physics results weren't that hot. All I wanted to do was draw and ride mountain bikes and that was it. However they put all my [sketch] work together and sent it off to 'Cov' and two weeks later I had

the interview. The university said there were thousands of applicants for the course every year for just eighty places...and then a few weeks later they offered me a slot. It was then that I figured out what I was drawing and doing could be something quite cool and serious [as a career].

What did you find at University?

That was in 2000 and it was a highly competitive, testosterone-filled environment of guys that just wanted to design cars. It was super-clear for me right at the beginning that I wouldn't do that because I didn't 'get' it. I love those types of cars but my question as 'what are you going to do with that?' There were already enough car companies out there and I believed there were already a lot of people wanting to do that kind of design. I tried to absorb as much as the glamour and passion of the car side and do my own take on it for



bikes. Looking at the internet back then you did not find much other than Glynn Kerr and a couple of other people who had chucked up some sketches. Although the legends of motorcycle design were doing their thing at the time, there were no real surprises. For me it wasn't enough. So I decided to focus on it and see where I could go. Three years later I landed an internship with BMW in Munich. This was absolutely fantastic...even if I knew from the outset that I did not want to work at BMW! I knew the experience I could get there would be second to none. I had the legendary Edgar Heinrich – now the lead designer again at BMW – as my mentor and within a couple of months it all made sense to me and I knew it was what I wanted to do.

Was it easy to maintain the bike interest through Uni?

Yeah, we were always at Brands Hatch or Silverstone for BSB or World Superbikes. It was the Neil Hodgson era on his orange Ducati.

So also people like Mackenzie and Hislop...

Exactly. And that was everything at the weekends. Again my Dad's enthusiasm for motor-sport helped. I think it was Autocar magazine on the car side and Bike magazine on the bike side and they were always lying around at home.

Going back a bit where did the compulsion to sketch and draw come from?

It was my own thing. I remember as a kid – especially after going to shows – coming home and being super-inspired and excited and you started drawing things. Looking back on them today you just think 'well, bikes on the market at the time were much cooler!' For me it was so precious, somehow. I remember putting sellotape over the top of my sketches so that they would be preserved! I have no idea where they are now. There was something special about that 'creation'. Although I had so much respect for the market and the products they were creating it just felt like there was so much opportunity there. Yes, Suzuki was white-and-

blue and Hondas were red-white-blue and the Kawasakis were green but they were all very similar somehow. Back then the car industry had a bit of everything going on (whereas now it is in a small corridor and has become a little vague to me) and I thought 'we must be able to do something similar on the bike side'.

If you had focussed on art and design and not the mathematical or scientific side would it still be possible to be where you are today?

Probably not. It was a blessing in disguise.

There was not much of a scene then or online references to take inspiration from?

I felt like I was really on my own. There had been a couple of projects from former students and they were a big inspiration for me and there was the one website – which is still valid – 'Car Design News' that occasionally had a study or article about motorcycle design. It was mainly through the media that I was spurred on.



Seeing new bikes in the press did you find it daunting to try and match and beat what was going on or did it spur you on?

It spurred me on because I saw the opportunity. I saw how much was happening in the car world and how little on the bike side. At the time I wasn't sure if the car world needed that [experimentalism in design] and was exponentially exploding or because the bike world was

small and niche and it just wasn't necessary to progress at a rate. As it turns out it was the right option to really be inspired by this whole car design world and apply it to bikes. During my degree I had my [internship] time at BMW and this played a big role of course. Funny enough my final degree thesis was a very functionally-driven project. I designed a bike – and it is a little embarrassing – for courier riders in cities. My parents were living in London and all I saw were these guys flying around on clapped-out Honda 650s with a top-box on the back. Super-reliable little bikes...but covered in crap and guys riding with stuff under their arms. It was a tough industry using products that were certainly not designed for the task in hand. So I came up with a product and infrastructure idea for how it could be tackled. Having come back from BMW and been influenced by single cylinder 650 engines I designed a vehicle with a trellis frame and a small compact engine in the front with space to load the thing up with luggage. At the same time it had to be small, compact and agile. As I approached this project from a 'user' or problem-solving point of view and then came up with something dynamic and new; that's what set the whole thing in stone for me. You have to solve a problem with design.

What was it like at BMW?

An incredible experience but left me thinking 'can I really do the design part?' Like most students I just wanted to draw and make super-crazy and cool things like one-arm front hub steering or fantasy objects. So I had this question 'can I actually make products for the market in five years time?' After school – and something totally surprising – I ended up being the only one with a first-class degree that year [of graduation] and I was the only one not designing cars! It was odd but it landed me a seat in Honda's studio in Frankfurt. I ended up sitting at a desk with a Japanese boss and being shipped off to Japan every couple of months for a crash-course into what motorcycle design really is.

Did they throw you into it?

I guess you are aware of Japanese hierarchy in companies? No disrespect to Japan because it is still one of my favourite countries and cultures but in that system you spend many years just learning the ropes. It takes years and years to gain the responsibility and status enough to have a say in anything.



How quickly did you realise that?

Well I was only there for three years and after one year I was already quite unsettled. I loved the company but wanted to progress fast. Maybe I was too impatient! We were a satellite studio in Frankfurt and there was also one in Rome and a couple more around the world and then there was the Mothership in Japan. If I was working on a project then there were another twenty people working on it also somewhere else and everything that I did would be sent off to Japan and you wouldn't know what would happen. Suddenly you might see something on the market one day that looked roughly like what you might have sketched but you were not involved in the development at all. Or you would hear nothing back at all. It seemed and felt like 80% of what were doing was simply for the bin or in the name of development, which is not a bad thing it's just that they like to try everything figuring out future directions. So it was quite frustrating because in that studio you felt isolated. The times that I had in Japan were super-cool...but the projects were a little numb. I wanted to move. The

drawers of my desk at the time were full of the sketches of the guy who was there before me and I never used to look at them because everything was on hard-discs and servers. One day I took a look wondering what had happened to the guy. It turned out to be the work of the boss that I have now Sebastien Stassin. He did his first couple of years at Piaggio scooters, then Honda and then ended up at Kiska and is now the Creative Officer at Kiska; that means he has the veto on every single project. He had the same education and experience at Honda and I guess came to the same conclusion: that to have an influence and impact and get somewhere you had to go 'small' first of all...and KTM had already caused a stir on the design side.

“As you get more experienced you need to know more about why a frame is here and why this part is there. As you start to question more and more things about a vehicle you need to have more interaction with the team on the other side...”

In which way?

The RC8 was out there. I saw how small and intriguing the company who had designed this RC8 'thing' was. When the RC8 featured on the front cover of MCN and created such an impact I was led to KTM and then this small design agency, Kiska, on the outskirts of Salzburg. During my time at Honda I had actually met Sebastien at the EICMA show and I had

a face for the name. We made contact and he said if I needed help I should get in touch. I remember feeling guilty at the time for spending so much time at the KTM stand because I knew that was where the cool stuff was. There were three designers on the KTM team at the time and I met them at EICMA and recognised that this was where 'it' was happening. In 2007 I contacted Sebastien and said I was not moving anywhere at Honda and actually at the time they had started to have problems and were downscaling internally. The Frankfurt studio actually closed in 2008 a year after I left but it was already evident that it was happening because all the major design topics had been cancelled. There were more and more colour graphics that were being outsourced to Frankfurt and it was not interesting anymore. I spent a lot of time in Japan in 2007 at HGA – their main HQ – which was fantastic. The team there were so good and I think so many people say it: 'You can take the people out of Honda but not Honda out of the people' somehow it just lives on...but I knew there would be no chance for an individual there. There would be no opportunity for flair and to really make something move and happen because it is a massive combined effort. Whereas starting here was the biggest crash course ever. I realised that everything I had learnt at University, BMW and Honda was not relevant for the speed and quality of what I needed to apply in the first couple of months here. It knocked me off my feet at the start and I was completely unprepared for the stress and pressure and the fast paced development times. I immediately learnt that this is Kiska and KTM's advantage and this is why it will make sense and if things get bad then KTM will be OK because they react. I made a move from Honda in desperation and I had some contacts at Kiska and KTM and knew they were cool and up-and-coming and wondered 'would this be the job?' After a couple of months it was clear that it was and I have to get to grips with being a designer again because it was a whole new level.



To do what you do: is the scientific or mathematical side more important than the art and the vision? Could you have reached a First at Coventry without that 'numbers' background?

Hmmm, tough to tackle. For example we are currently looking for designers and every week I sit down with our HR department and go through the twenty-thirty applicants from junior designers, to students to designers who send in their portfolio. I'm looking for those guys with the creative flair and the vision to make something so new and spectacular and progressive but at the same time show an understanding that they have to think of a product that has to be on the market in a couple of years. These guys come along once in a blue moon and when you find them then they are gold dust. That balance is probably the hardest thing to find. I'm negotiating on a day-to-day basis with the R&D team and management at KTM and they have to give us the right amount of freedom in order to express the new progressive 'something' and we have to be aware that it has to be produced and came out of a tool. It has to have screw points, be ergonomically correct and function. I think this is the other reason that KTM have an advantage as a manufacturer. We have people on the Kiska side that understand that. The form that follows function is a massive topic.

So what are your strengths? What side has to emerge strongest in the creative process?

We have to have a passion for simplicity in vehicles – in motorbikes – in terms of architecture on the KTMs I would say they are more reduced than any other motorcycle on the market. All the parts on the Super Duke have a main function. They all do 'so-and-so'...and they look good too! That's the attitude we have to have.

It must be hard to achieve that sometimes... to make something that works but also create a situation where people are throwing adjectives at it. With KTM, people like to say the bikes are 'radical' and 'head-turning'...

The reason the Super Duke is head-turning and radical is – aside from the wide rear tyre and 180 horse power – because it is 'very clear'. It is a Naked Bike. It's the same with everybody - whether it is mothers of the wives of my friends - they have to look at it three times because there is something different going on with it. For me when I think of a 'Naked Bike' then my mind goes to a CB-something from the 1970s which is a tank, a seat, a headlight and above somewhere there are some clocks and dials. If you look at the Super Duke then all those same elements are in place.

“The reason the Super Duke is head-turning and radical is because it is ‘very clear’...but there is also something different going on with it...”

The recipe is the same. If you try to apply that with some other naked bikes now then the tank is actually a plastic cover and there are covers and plastics everywhere. There is a headlight, except that it is integrated into a plastic cover, which is also behind the plastic cover holding the instruments...in all one big form. This is all just nonsense and I don't get it. This is not a motorcycle. The Super Duke has a headlight that is fork-mounted and it has a separate aluminium holder for the instruments which is - by the way - is holding the indicators out the front. It was the first bike of its generation to have this very simplified architecture. The light and panel were split they didn't have anything to do with each other any more. Love it or hate it - it doesn't matter - the trick was to make the tank and the headlight in one form. And that form is this super-leaning forward, aggressive 'something' that people feel when they are looking at it. They are not used to seeing things like that on a naked motorcycle.

By solving the problem of why do we have to mix all these components up to make one big unit at the front of the bike we have concentrated on the architecture of the machine and designed them for how they can work best and wrapped them up in something 'clean'. By embracing the technical issue first we have come up with a theme that is dynamic and exciting.

What about the ins-and-outs of your job? Some of the things away from the sketch-book? Is there a political line to follow sometimes?

There is quite a clear divide in what KTM R&D and Kiska are both responsible for. When it comes to engine, frame and suspension elements then the responsibility is 100% on KTM's side. However if there is something that the onlooker, or ultimately the owner, is going to question then we have to identify that. It has to 'feel' right. We do have an influence on that stuff but the responsibility lies with KTM. If I say: "that top line frame tube doesn't look like it sits right" then we can have an influence. Sometimes it might change sometimes it doesn't. Political line? Sure! We're a company...

The relationship between KTM and Kiska: do people keep their cards close to their chest or is everything out on the table?

It depends on the project, the project leader and the team that is working on it. One project can be vastly different to the other. Generally it is one of my daily jobs and goals to break down the walls that are there between the teams. It is just 'nature' and in the history of industrial design that relationship has been like that forever: the engineer thinks he has the best idea and then the designer says "yeah, but nobody will want to look at it" and then suggest changes. Fundamentally what will happen is that everybody standing around the thing will look and say "that's the one we have to have!" and ignore the engineer and this thing will be made and then go and break. Nobody will buy it or use it, so it only makes

sense if these guys work together. It is gold dust to be able to send a designer to KTM who is knowledgeable and knows why a motorbike should be the way it is and have the experience to give his 'take' on it and make the thing feel and look fascinating.

Normally they are super-happy with our results and normally we are happy with the proposal that comes from them. Often we do get a situation like: 'this is how it will be; go with it'. Normally if we are not satisfied or we do not believe it is the right way for KTM on the whole, for the brand, then we will satisfy the briefing but then do our recommendation in parallel. Of course if you give both options back to R&D then they will go with their original plan but there are escalation methods. We all have our own agendas and it has to be like that. There are factors to consider like being cost-effective and ease of manufacture but Kiska also want KTM to be the most progressive and most desirable motorcycle company out there. Gerald Kiska actually has the final say on the KTM side or things, or at least he has a veto.



How has your job evolved technically?

We have a modelling team so in the beginning 90% of my job was with the sketching and 10% with the clay models and sitting next to the CD modellers and guiding, helping and supporting. I had almost no interaction with the client at all. It was about fulfilling a design need and nothing else. As you get more expe-

rienced you need to know more about why a frame is here and why this part is there. As you start to question more and more things about a vehicle you need to have more interaction with the team on the other side. Up until about five years ago I was heading to KTM once a week - as most of the designers - to talk about the project I was working on but I always had my project manager with me. It is important in Kiska that the design team still has the lead, the say and the decision-making. If it is left up to a project manager then the main reason why you are there is gone. We are dealing with the biggest number of products that we have ever done from KTM and Husqvarna. My role is to ensure we have consistency over all of the things that we do. Before I would concentrate on making one bike look cool now I am focusing on overall brand design and strategy. Linking with strategic product managers at KTM on the products we are doing, what years they need to be implemented, when they will be on the market, the life cycle. For me it means planning already where we need to put our focus for innovation, new and progressive, what the vehicles have to do and what impact they will have on the market at specific times...and then how we do that and what kind of technology we will use. Things like talking to the R&D guys and saying "LED highlights? What are we doing, where are we going? What bikes are we going to use them on?" It is a much more strategically and conceptual way of working.

Was the 1290 biggie for you? The flagship effort?

Definitely. I was also heavily involved in the 1190 Adventure and although that has been a great success for KTM as well I think it has been a massive learning curve. It was the first time they stepped into the modern version of that segment. I think it is a little bit of a compromise. The Super Duke is definitely 'yes' the pinnacle of a KTM expression but for achievements I led the project with one of the other guys on the 2016 SX line. We went all-out to save every single gram of weight and come up

with solutions through design that would help the rider to win races. That was the only target. There was no styling there. The side shrouds on that bike looks like the most forward-facing, crazy, dynamic shape 'pointing to win' however the surfaces are all that the rider needs to hold with his knees, nothing more, nothing less. The old bike was bigger on the sides. We had all the top riders on the clay models. We had Stefan Everts I-don't-know-how-many-times to sit there and move around like he was racing. Clay is brilliant and even the car industry doesn't have the advantage of being able to put a ten times world champion on the seat to sculpt the surface. We wanted to know where the thing should be before we planned where we wanted it to be.

Is a naked bike more restrictive in terms of a palette for design?

The challenge is higher but you have the chance to shine and to do something even more radical is still there. Things like separating the headlight and the panel is just an example of what makes these things so special. Nobody else managed to achieve that. OK, I think the Ducati Streetfighter had a bit of it going on but also a lot of other stuff as well. The Super Duke was the epitome of the 'just reduce it down' philosophy. If I could have had it completely my way then I would not even have had plastic spoilers on the tail. It would have been a steel trellis subframe and nothing else. Why do you need that plastic? You don't. So the bike could have been pushed even more. Hence for 2017 what you'll see at the EICMA show!

Was there a part of the 1290 project that had you banging your head on the desk?

Easy one. We challenge the R&D guys all the time because when you turn a set of bars they go down low and we always want to have tanks that go up high in order to have some strong stance and gesture. We always collide there! We had some real issues with the Super Duke and conflicting ideas to the point where we

said from a design point of view “come on, it is a flagship model and it has to appear like this and is more important than the customer’s need to park the thing backwards in their garage”. We ended up arriving to the right compromise as it turns out but we also ended up coming down and having to create new features and ideas on the tank.

The 1290 must be like the best ‘business card’ for you and for the reverb around the industry. I mean it is one of the reasons we are sitting here now...

Yeah. I guess. However I think the shock is going away a little bit even if the industry could not believe that last years Husqvarna models at EICMA were from the same place. But I have to underline again that we work by thinking and by solving problems and not by styling. That’s why we are always able to come up with something new, something different and something that pushes the boundaries. I think we solve problems by design thinking.

So now as a ‘curator’ across the KTM brand do you still get the inkling or the energy to be inspired and pick up the pencil?

The energy is there, the time definitely isn’t! I’ve got a great team of guys behind me who can visualise something that I might come up with. More often than not the guys themselves these days come up with such crazy ideas and my job is almost to say “OK, the guys in KTM are not even going to look at this...but what if?” because there might be something in that initial idea.

Does an idea happen in an instant or takes months to evolve?

The medium that we use – clay and pencils – is so fast. You can very quickly have something to look at. If you are building something in a workshop or on CAD it can take hours. We can very quickly get to a result where we think ‘oh...no’ or ‘oh...that’s cool, there’s something in it’.

Without giving too much of the game away about what you are doing next...what do you think about the future for naked bikes? They were seen as the ‘old man’ bike and now they are seen as more essential, practical and an option for fun and innovation...look at the Super Duke GT for example...

I think in terms of stance, proportion and dynamic we have already achieved something that won’t be beaten for a while. I think technology is coming super-fast and we are embracing that...and taking the design-thinking approach you are going to see some mad ideas in terms of some of the key components on those bikes have been radically re-thought and how they are constructed and how they look and feel. In general I think naked bikes have had this massive rise and surge of popularity due to the Streetfighter scene that happened during the 90s and 00s and now of course due to the emergence of the café racer/ scrambler/ custom scene. I remember seeing tail-ends on sport bikes that looked as though they’d be hit by a heat-gun and been bent up to the sky. That was a trend and the reason why the OEMs could cash-in on naked bikes with attitude and sporty emphasis. However I guess what has happened is that people have been buying these bikes as a commuter or as a practical bike with elements that are not that practical. I think in order for that segment to stay alive it has to embrace the needs of those people much more. Ready to Race or not they have to fulfil the requirements of a larger audience. How on earth are you going to come up with something that ticks all the boxes? I think the whole market has to deal with that. Ducati with their Scrambler, BMW with their RnineT...I think there is real need for naked bikes. It attracted a whole new type of client: smaller riders, beginners, commuters it seemed like everybody could ride it...but in the past it looked a bit boring. That’s not good. It might be satisfying some needs but not the basic need – I feel – of why a person might come to motorcycling; namely that it is exciting and emotional. I don’t believe this will ever change. There is even more room for development there.

DESIGNING KTMs: CRAIG DENT





KTM

On the edge of November and, yep, Christmas decorations and themed-songs will very soon be prevalent. Maybe almost time then to take another dip into KTM's 'Aladdin's cave' of Powerwear products. Flicking through the booklet never fails to amaze just how vast the Austrian's collection of accessories and 'fan-o-bilia' actually is. The diversity is pretty astonishing and must cast the company (once more) as a leader among their motorcycle manufacturer peers. Where else can you get an official Arai licensed lid in KTM colours and graphics, purchase an Ogio backpack and then also order a child's cot mobile as well as an off-road bath duck? The Powerwear website also has a cool function to customise your own KTM riding leathers with liveries and graphics; you can even get your own name printed.

In short the Powerwear has absolutely anything and everything a KTM rider or fan might consider unwrapping or bringing into the home.

More here: www.ktm.com/powerwear







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FLY
RACING

FINDING OR MAKING A PLACE...

By Adam Wheeler

We are starting to slip into the dead zone of the MXGP/motocross competitive calendar. Evidently there are still Grand Prix stars training and riding in preparation for potentially lucrative or pocket-filling supercross appearances in France, Germany, Italy or Switzerland but for the most part factory teams have completed a testing phase for 2017 and will be downing tools. Riders get a few weeks to re-charge before looking at a date sometime in November to start laying down the base training aspect of their next racing season. Then onto bike time in the new year, further set-up tests and before-you-know-it the likes of LaCapelle Marival in France, Hawkstone Park in the UK (Feb 5th) and the mini three-round Italian Championship will be starting everything off again.

Perusing www.racerxonline.com last week I was struck by an article illustrating just how many former champions and/or winners at the highest level of AMA competition were still to confirm 2017 employment. The fact that Supercross kicks off at Anaheim on January 7th means that the coming weeks are slightly more critical for American-based racers and the general difficulty of maintaining a team came to light by the absence of places.

There are at least two (maybe three) squads that will not make the MXGP line-up in 2017 with a select of the smaller set-ups instead looking towards the supporting EMX European Championships (nine rounds for the 250 series) as a more viable form of international racing while profiting from the Grand Prix scene and

publicity. MXGP itself might be gaining extra sponsors and is ploughing a determined path to bigger international exposure (I'm curious to see if their Bein Sports television contact and Eurosport discussions from a recent Sportel show appearance in Monaco will bear any fruit) but the fabric of the championship outside of the factory teams are struggling to keep up. The thinking all along is that a bigger window of promotion would mean a more viable investment for sponsors but backing for racing is still the richest elixir sought by all and sundry and reaches all the way up to a behemoth like Formula One.

Some teams are wealthier than others, some more professional and proactive, some more ambitious and speculative, some boasting more longevity but the prospect of completing a twenty-Grand Prix slate in 2017 means some serious budgeting, and then a degree of prayer and hope that the rider roster can avoid injury to actually complete most of the dates and the prospect of forty motos (sixty including qualification heats).

Risks increase for the riders as their contract prospects seem to be diminishing and the latter trend seems to be the case in the USA. While some very good athletes in paddocks in Europe and the United States might be evaluating their career options both for 2017 and beyond perhaps an element of this cull or filter is just the movement of sport and the passage of time, the passing of generations.



A rider like Dean Wilson might have excellent pedigree and a proven CV but has the Scot's body taken too much of a bashing (with the inevitable side-effect on confidence and mentality) to be a contender for a front-line ride? (in my opinion he still has much to offer and is only 24). Does someone like Christophe Charlier in MXGP (a rider who decimated the European Championship ahead of riders like Herlings and Roczen) who has won motos and taken Grand Prix podiums and represented Yamaha and Husqvarna at factory level destined to remain a talent never-to-be-fully-realised? Motocross feels like it chews up riders and gobs them out at a faster and harder rate than other sports and motorsports.

“The teams and riders that enter the gate in 2017 really are the elite in more than one sense of the word. ...”

Maybe it is the quicker influx of the next ‘great potential’ and there always seems to be a fresh challenger or gifted individual that catches the eye of team bosses, who can set the market with contracts because demand outweighs the supply. Never have results been more important for a rider...but then also their worth outside a classification sheet also come under higher scrutiny. Can they team play? Can they help justify a valued sponsor's speculation? Can their name, reputation and media and PR worth help attract

extra backing? Professional racers need to be more acutely aware of this; it might be the final few percentage that helps tip the balance in their favour when it comes to a team or manufacturer's decision-making.

An easy solution to making sure an AMA or MXGP gate is fully ripe is to increase the number of saddles. To make racing as simple and realistic as possible to teams...but this also chocks against ambitions of promoters to try and push the sport bigger. As I've said before, MotoGP bankroll many independent teams to help make the grid (with prize-money allegedly scarce) but a large part of that financing comes from TV revenue; something that motocross (even supercross I'm betting) cannot provide. Cutting the calendar, reducing the race trucks and paddock, going back to two-strokes, slashing entry fees; all appear to be suggestions that involve too much of a regression in the eyes of some, and the first victim of any dumbing-down of motocross will be the slashing of TV budget. If the sport is not filmed, broadcast or streamed live in some capacity then the future has to be bleak, especially if any chance of possible sponsors are to ever fall in love with one of motorsports most accessible and intense disciplines.

Stepping back and motocross is inadvertently streamlining with every season and the teams and riders that enter the gate for all twenty (or nineteen) of the Grands Prix in 2017 and make the bulk of the seventeen 450SX Main Events really are the elite in more than one sense of the word.



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▶ JUSTIN BARCIA



FEATURE

THE COMPLETE PACKAGE

UNRAVELLING THE SENSATION THAT STORMED MXGP IN 2016

By Adam Wheeler

Photos by Ray Archer



THE REVELATION OF MXGP: TIM GAJSER



PLAY

Tim Gajser is standing in the darkness. Fox's 'Celebration of Speed' event in their modern and typically Californian office in Irvine (all open plan, bright, airy, cubic and creative) has neglected some stage lights for Jeff Emig and Ricky Carmichael as they enter the impressive roster of the brand's athletes who have succeeded in 2016. Gajser is the last to be welcomed to the platform and after the duo, with their banter and friendly jibes, have spoken with Ryan Dungey, Livia Lancelot and been sent a video message by the holidaying Ken Roczen. It is a mark of Gajser's humility that he handles the attention and the spotlight (or lack of one) with grace and a giddy sense of 'what am I doing here?' He accepts a cake for his twentieth birthday and there is an audible sense of disbelief from Carmichael that the Slovenian has trailblazed to so much at such a young age. Fox's proceedings prior to the season-closing Monster Energy Grand Prix of USA comes with their usual high level of presentation and thought (lighting issues aside). A Pro-Am mini-bike track is noisily gathering attention outside, food comes courtesy of fresh tacos, a live band gets ready to jam and cocktails named after the riders are being served (Gajser's mix being vodka, lemonade and 'Honda' Strawberry).

Gajser, as ever flanked by his father Bogomir and older brother Nejc, is shaking hands and doing the rounds. He became the first back-to-back FIM World Champion in different classes since Greg Albertyn in '92-93 only four days beforehand and is the youngest MXGP title

winner since the invention of the four-stroke formula. Tim may seem a little wide-eyed with what is bound to be just a slice of victory spoils, but the grin and the giggle are in place. As is the maturity that helped him decimate the MXGP class in 2016 and deal with a raft of rivals far older and more experienced. Gajser ripped through the premier category from the get-go with a 1-1 in Qatar. He went on to win almost 50% of the thirty-six motos and gathered sixteen podium results from eighteen rounds (winning seven overalls, with eight Pole Positions). There was nothing lucky, circumstantial or questionable about his synergy with the CRF450RW and how he whipped, turned-down, gunned and guided that motorcycle to a run of dominance.

"We knew that Tim was really fast on a 450 and that he was strong. We saw him winning two motos easily last year in the German Championship...but to win a title with such consistency all season we honestly did not expect that," opines Team Manager and Owner Giacomo Gariboldi a few days later in the paddock at Glen Helen.

"I didn't really see a change in him," the Italian adds. "I think his riding style became a little less aggressive and he is thinking more during a race as well as cutting down the risks he used to take with a 250...but otherwise he is still the Tim we met and know from 2014."

"Tim is the full package," comments HRC General Manager Roger Harvey; the man responsible for signing Gajser to a multi-year factory deal during 2015 that will keep '243' in 'red' for the next three seasons and maybe in 2020 also. "Obviously he is very young and being that age you probably expected something different from him; you saw how he had to 'get up' a few times on the 250 last year. He is an unbelievable thinker. He works things out and doesn't really change his strategy. He is very much what I term as old school 'go out and win it'. I can relate to him because he is

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so much like the guys I used to race: hard as nails, never gives up and just keeps pushing and pushing. It's like he is from another era."

Gajser's story is quite well known and in the wake of notching the 2015 MX2 FIM World Championship after Jeffrey Herlings checked-out with a dislocated hip. 'Tiga' comes as part of a family package with Nejc serving as his right-hand man and Bogo the ever-present trainer and mentor; frequently seen barking at his son in the start gate. The rapid-fire Slovenian dialogue coming like some kind of mantra at Tim's back as he preps the ground. Off the bike and Gajser's yellow cap is always steadfastly in place and although he claimed Honda's first No.1 plate since 2000 in the blue ribbon division of the sport he will not budge from the '243' that has become a badge of honour and symbol for the brother he never knew and was killed motocrossing before Tim was born.

European 65, 85, 125 and World 125 Championships hoisted Gajser as a junior that nobody could ignore. He was part of KTM's programme until a forgettable first Grand Prix year in 2013 where several mechanical problems caused the family to become disillusioned with the Orange. Michele Rinaldi jetted to Slovenia to try and bring Gasjer to Yamaha but the clan opted for Gariboldi's Honda set-up instead for 2014 and that's when he claimed his first Grand Prix podium and also grabbed fifth in the MX2 series at his first full attempt...while still at school and studying economics. The writing was back on the wall. Since a maiden Grand Prix win at Arco di Trento in 2015, MXGP circuits have become distinctly more yellow and boisterous with an enlarging Slovenian contingent following their new hero. In a country with just a population of 2.5 million people Gajser's (now double) world championship status seems to have captured national attention.

The rider from Ptju has stirred MXGP to the core, even prompting new thinking on the youth and intensity needed to win at the very

tip of the motocross pyramid [see our other feature this month]. After Romain Febvre's breakthrough rookie success at the age of 23 in 2015 Gajser then developed a whole new level of riding and performance. We wanted some insight from those working with him as to the 'hows' and 'whys'. "He is analytical and he can work things out race to race and even lap to lap and you don't see that in many riders," offers Harvey. "Let's go back two years to Argentina. Race one: a disaster. Terrible. I spoke to him after and asked what was going on and he shook his head and said 'no...I need to go back and reset'. That was him thinking about what he did in that first race and making sure it didn't happen in the second and the result was that he was right up there. Generally he is 'on it' and he's very aware of his surroundings and what is going on in the race. Add to that he is a hard and physical character."

"He is riding the Honda how it should be ridden," he adds. "He is quite smooth and that's the DNA of Honda. It is smooth and rideable and quick enough to win Grands Prix, as we've seen. He is using a 450 how it should be ridden."

"It is very difficult for a rider to keep the focus over eighteen GPs," says Gariboldi. "There are so many motos. Everybody has been up-and-down this season. Tim had a few difficult GPs – like Assen and Lommel – where he did not reach the podium but I think you have to expect this from a nineteen year old kid. I think he felt the pressure at the end of the season whereas up to halfway he just went out to play and enjoy. I believe when he saw the lead go up and almost reach 100 points then he was thinking seriously about winning the championship and the pressure came but nobody was putting that on him, we weren't even talking about the title."

Backpedalling from the Fox glitterati we sat down to talk with Tim two weeks previously at the Grand Prix of the Netherlands at Assen. It

was Gajser's first 'match point' and he could have entered the record books across the Dutch sand. It was not meant to be, partly due to some of the pressure that Gariboldi intimidated. An off-track excursion in the second moto provided the only blip on an extraordinary scorecard when he broke the Honda's throttle cable and DNF-ed.

The day before we encountered a seemingly relaxed Honda man at his family's camper in the Assen paddock. Folding out two collapsible chairs we chatted for the better part of thirty minutes and through a discourse that was remarkable similar to a first feature interview in 2014; Gajser really hadn't changed that much. Still smiley, thoughtful and easy to laugh... even if the subject matter was now much more serious and wide reaching than all the talk of 'potential' two summers ago. Again it was easy to forget just how far and how quickly he has sailed...



Are you aware of the story you've made this year?

I never watched the statistics or paid too much attention to the history but I know the big names like Albertyn, Everts and Tony. It was about keeping the pressure away but I knew that would be difficult the more the season went on. I really tried to keep calm and to ride only like I know.

Do you feel that the season has passed in the blink of an eye?

Actually this year feels like it has gone so quickly. I still remember Qatar really well and the first race that we won and now we are here at the beginning of September. I cannot believe how fast life goes when you are enjoying it. I guess it is unbelievable what we have done in my first year in MXGP but I'm glad we did it.

“YOU HAVE TO BE SO FOCUSED TO DO THIS AND, PERHAPS MORE IMPORTANTLY, REALLY MOTIVATED. THAT’S THE THING THAT IS TOUGH: TO KEEP MOTIVATED ALL THE TIME. IN EVERY SPORT YOU HAVE UPS-AND-DOWNS...WHEN IT COMES TO THE ‘DOWNS’ THEN YOU HAVE TO BE EVEN MORE MOTIVATED AND THAT’S THE HARD PART.”

Why has the year gone quickly? Is it mostly about the fun, like you said?

I think so. When you are enjoying what you do everyday then it feels like everything goes fast. In fact the last couple of years have been like that. Even from the 125 days and then straight into the world championship. It is four years now I am in Grands Prix and it goes so quickly. From February until the races stop coming in October; this period passes very fast. I guess it is about loving what you do.



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“IN ALL THE INTERVIEWS I MADE BEFORE QATAR I DID NOT WANT TO BE ‘LOUD’. I DIDN’T WANT TO SAY A LOT...I WANTED TO SHOW IT. I THINK THE GUYS THAT TALK A LOT ARE PERHAPS NOT SO GOOD. I THOUGHT ‘LET THE PEOPLE TALK WHAT THEY WANT...I WILL COME ON THE TRACK AND SHOW THEM’...”

So 2015 might have been a bit 'slower' than this year. You had moments like that first win at Arco and then big crashes in Holland and the UK that slowed you down...

Last year was more 'on the edge' because there were many ups and downs and it was not a season where you expect to win the title but everything came together in the end. I knew that if Jeffrey was healthy and everything was 'normal' then he'd be the champion, but, well, that's sport and it can turn around. You really never know until the last chequered flag. You have to keep that focus all the way on the goal. Don't stop the training. Keep going until that last flag.

What about the emotion of being MXGP champion...? Can you talk of your experience in MX2?

Last year was unbelievable but I think this year is more special. Coming into the season I don't think anybody could believe that I could do as well as I have. Maybe only a couple of people. If I'm honest then maybe only my Dad! From the outside when I was listening, seeing social media and reading that if I made the top ten in a few races then that would be good, then you never forget that. I made almost every podium and for a rookie I think that is pretty unbelievable...even for myself, for Honda after such a long time, my family and Slovenia...everybody.

Do you feel the extent of the impact you are having?

When you are young you make some goals for yourself and what you want to achieve in your career and one of those for me was to be world champion in MX2 and last year was unexpected...but I was so glad and so happy. I notice the impact in Slovenia because many more people know about or have an interest in the sport and have followed me. It is interesting to see how a sport can grow so much and people who know about MXGP can already see the many [Slovenian] fans that travel to the GPs close by like in Arco or Czech Republic. Wintersports is pretty big but it feels like if you ask anyone in a shop 'what is motocross' or 'who

is Tim Gajser?' and they know... is something special and I feel lucky to be able to grow the sport.

So can you go to the supermarket without hassle?

Other people are quite shy. You can see them looking and turning around and the same when we go places like the swimming pool. They want photos all the time and it is cool to be recognised. It's nice. I'm happy we have come so far but the important thing is to remain the same guy that you were before and I think I am doing that.

You are lucky to have the family close by but with all the sponsors and attention it must be tricky to stop your head from ballooning...

For sure the family help me a lot with that because not only are we close but we also work together. I think you can have big sponsors and partners but in the end you have to keep being the same. I think I am. I speak with everyone, I sign all the posters. So I try...but it is also becoming harder and harder because the fan group is growing and it is difficult to talk with and be with everybody. Sometimes I cannot sign all of the posters...I think they also need to understand that because I'm human and not a robot. I have to take a break between motos.

HARVEY: "THERE ARE ONE OR TWO AREAS THAT I'D LIKE TO SEE HIM IMPROVE OR GET BETTER...JUST LITTLE THINGS. I THINK HIS PATIENCE SOMETIMES IN A RACE IS THAT OF A NINETEEN-TWENTY YEAR OLD! ON THE TECHNICAL SIDE THE JAPANESE ARE VERY PLEASED WITH HIS FEEDBACK..."

A bike revs hard nearby. Bogo Gajser is also in action for the Veterans World Cup at Assen. Heavy paternal influence is nothing new in motocross. There are famously overbearing examples and some horror stories; fathers who have helped their children from a young age and probably sacrificed so much but who simply cannot 'release' their competent offspring into a professional and responsible environment. Bogo comes across as an intense individual and is omnipresent around Tim but the duo have a functional relationship that has evolved with the athlete's success and proficiency. "Everybody goes on about Tim's Dad but his heart is absolutely in the right place," believes Harvey, who needed to manage how HRC have accommodated the family dynamic. "He has the passion and with Tim he has a lot of knowledge. He can tell what Tim wants and what he wants from his bike. Also the upbringing he's given Tim means that he keeps his feet on the ground. You can go into the Gariboldi tent and Tim will be there sitting on his own. It's like he is one of the boys; very humble. Bogo is a different kettle of fish but the whole family is involved in his racing and it's been like that since he was little."



"You can go straight to Tim but you can also go to Bogo and the Dad will be the first to say when perhaps he hasn't ridden as he could or should and explain why he might have made a mistake," he continues. "And Tim knows; it is quite interesting to see the two of them. Coming from Slovenia nobody knows what they are all saying!"

Gariboldi has seen the father-son up close and on a daily basis. It was the Italian's idea to integrate Bogo as part of the technical staff two years ago that helped gel the family within the team. Giacomo believes there could be some change on the horizon. Gajser has been in a first serious relationship in 2016 and his central importance to HRC has now increased to a level where the pressure and responsibility is new territory for the Gajzers.

"The relationship between the team and his Dad through the season has changed a little bit and that's normal because Tim is growing and becoming a man," Gariboldi reveals. "He only just turned twenty. I think he feels that he needs his Dad and together they have done a great job and Tim has arrived to where he is because they both worked together for all these years...but I think the relationship is changing a little bit between the two."

How have things changed with your dad? He is your trainer, friend, mentor but as the races go on and you build experience do you need him a bit less?

Like you said he has been a mentor from the time when he put me on the bike and he is still my trainer. I have learned a lot from him and when he talks about lines or something else then I end up seeing that he is still right. Even if I am leading the championship and one of the best riders in the world he still sees some things that I never do-

An example?

With the lines. During a race I am pretty good with lines and I change them quite a lot but he'll still find something else where I can be even faster. These things and other small details are really important because the other guys in MXGP are really quick - right through the top ten - and the competition is really tight. If you don't get a good start and get those lines rightaway then it is tough to come through the pack. So any advice from him is always welcome and important.

You mentioned in our other interviews that you talked about working together and ended up making an adjustment. Was that essential to keep a good relationship?

For sure. It is not easy that your father is your trainer as well. It is very tough. Many times we don't have the same opinion but also many times we come together on the same line and find the best way together. That was the key... so it was important we had that conversation because I was able to trust him even more.

You seem very placid...whereas he appears to be the opposite! Anxious, nervy and focussed...are you more like your mother in terms of your character?

Actually I'm more like my Dad. My Mum and Dad divorced...and I think I am like him but he talks much louder! We both love motocross and we both give everything to live our lives this way and live our dreams. So I think we are similar but he talks fast...and loudly.



What about your girlfriend? From seeing social media she is clearly a big part of your life...

I think that part of your life is really important. Until December last year almost all of what I knew was just about motocross. We started dating around Christmas when I was on holidays and not training. From Christmas until new year I took a one-and-a-half week break and didn't work at all. My dad said 'take a rest...it will be a long season' and I was free for a little bit. So we met and immediately you can feel if you have a connection with a person

and until now it has been unbelievable and I'm really happy we found each other. We met through Snapchat! And she asked if I wanted a drink and three times I said 'no, I don't have any time, I have to train' and after the third time I gave in and we spent all evening together. She comes from a town 20km from my house.

So how will things change for you in the future in terms of living, going to the States, sharing your life?

I like the challenges life brings and even going out to find new ones. I'm really happy right now and I think that is also key to good results. I think happiness brings extra motivation and from the people you have around you. It is perhaps more important than anything else. If you are not happy in your environment then it will affect what you are doing.

So what is the next goal for happiness away from the track? A new house? A new car?

I'm not a guy who runs out and buys things. For sure I want to make my own life as well. I'm not thinking too much about it at the moment though.

Where do you live at the moment then?

I share an apartment with my brother and I have a gym as well. Times are changing though. We are not kids anymore and we're growing up and my family understands that and sees that I am happy. It is also what I expect from them because they were also young as well and they found love and know what it is all about.

Would you want to change anything? Would you always want to be based in Slovenia or would somewhere like Monaco come calling?

If I am honest then I would always prefer to live in Slovenia. I want to be there. I'm not too sure where yet but it was the country where I was born and where I have lived all my life. I think you have everything there: the lakes, the Alps, a little bit of the sea. You have a little bit of everything.

Are you as fast on the skis or snowboard as a motocross bike?

I'm not too bad on the skis but it has a few years now since I've done it before I haven't had enough time. I was even skiing competitively at one point. It was good but when you start becoming a professional in something else then you tend to drop other sports.

You are so strong on the 450 and throw it around like a BMX so can you tell a small secret about your training? Are you doing something like biathlon and using the mountains?

Haha! Everything is in the head. If I tell you right now then everybody will know!

A small example-

For motocross you need everything, and I don't think there are many sports like it. In football you need the legs, the condition and the judgement but motocross is much more because you have to combine this with co-ordination and ability, good cardio. It is such a strong mix. You have to have a really good programme...[smiles] what I can say is that riding a motorbike every day is not necessary.

"GAJSER IN 2017? THERE WILL BE SOME CHANGES AWAY FROM THE GATE... BUT AT THE AGE OF TWENTY HE CAN ONLY GET STRONGER, WISER AND TOUGHER."

Are you a little afraid of being world champion at nineteen years of age? You will have done it all...

Not really afraid but it does feel like you have met all of your goals already...and you are just nineteen. You have done everything in Europe. I have been 65, 85, 125 champion. MX2 last year and now MXGP. I am not a guy who wants records or ten world titles but doing supercross is one of my dreams and plans for the future. If I go to the U.S. at the age of twenty... I don't know. It will be difficult but I will be happy to try.

If I took the bike away and said you could not race anymore what other goal would you have?

That's something I haven't really thought about. You've surprised me with that question. At nineteen years old I think I have a couple of good years in motocross! I don't have the feeling that I want or could change my job. You have to be so focussed to do this and, perhaps more importantly, really motivated. That's the thing that is tough: to keep motivated all the time. In every sport you have ups-and-downs and when you have ups – winning GPs all the time or races quite easily – then you are always motivated. When it goes to the other side and the 'downs' come then you have to be even more motivated and that's the hard part. That's tough. I think I am quite good with that.

But you haven't had that many 'downs'...

I have had my moments! Thailand last year, Valkenswaard as well! [He was denied a second moto start in Thailand due to treatment for dehydration and suffered a big practice crash in Holland]. Also Lommel this year and my mistake in the first race before going the complete opposite in the second race.

Well, that must have been a low moment of thirty minutes...

Yes but you don't know what it felt like to be so disappointed like that. I went to the camper to find some peace and say to myself 'you need to change something'. It is not easy to keep motivated but I managed to find 'something'.

Lastly is Qatar still one of the most emotional moments of 2016? There have been so many podiums and wins...

Yeah, it was one of the most emotional for me. One of the best wins of my career. I came to Qatar to show the whole motocross world....it was just amazing and not many expected me to do so well. I think the GPs in Italy – Arco and Mantova – and winning in front of so many Slovenian fans was special. Every win is special.

FEATURE

I think you might have been lying in Qatar pre-race when you said to us you didn't know where you'd be in the pack...

Why?! In all the interviews I made before Qatar I did not want to be 'loud'. I didn't want to say a lot...I wanted to show it. I think the guys that talk a lot are perhaps not so good. I thought 'let the people talk what they want...I will come on the track and show them'.

Gajser took possession of his FIM gold medal on the podium at Glen Helen. It will be a matter of weeks before analysis will be made on how to replicate 2016 in MXGP next year. "There are one or two areas that I'd like to see him improve or get better but that is a decision between him and Bogo and to do with his riding," says Harvey. "Just little things. I think his patience sometimes in a race is that of a nineteen year old! On the technical side the Japanese are very pleased with his feedback and he gets his bike how he wants it and doesn't change it that much."

"He loves riding," he adds. "When you go to a test and do the work and then say 'OK, test finished' we get a long face because he wants to ride more. He just loves riding motorbikes."

Gajser made the unexpected switch to MXGP at the end of 2015 and after having made a public statement at Lommel and the Belgian GP last summer that he would stay in MX2 this year. The decision was pushed through after winning MX2 at the final round. Tim has openly stated his desire to try Supercross but has time on his side and recently intimated to HRC that he would be willing to stay in MXGP for the foreseeable future. Fortunately for Gajser and his future goals Jeffrey Herlings' long-awaited graduation in 2017 means a fresh test. "We discussed with him and the family in Lommel and they decided they would stay in Europe until the end of the contract and then maybe move to the U.S," said Gariboldi. "Next year will be tough because Jeffrey is moving to the MXGP class and he will have another challenge; I think he will want to show that he can beat Jeffrey."





GAJSER IN 2017?

Next year will be a first for Tim Gajser: a maiden campaign as a defending champion. There will be changes away from the gate. HRC are expected to announce a small reshuffle in their factory set-up at the EICMA show next week with Giacomo Gariboldi's infrastructure essentially becoming the main base for Honda and Gajser becoming the lead rider in the 'official' team with Evgeny Bobryshev alongside. The Slovenian rarely had a technical issue in 2016, which was a golden term for the Japanese brand, and work will already have started on development of the brand new CRF450RW; will there be any issues there for 243? There will be little in the way of surprise factor around Tim for his second season in the premier class and just his fifth in the world championship but at the age of twenty he can only get stronger, wiser and tougher. Motivation should not be an issue because of his age.

If there was a low point this year then it came in last few weeks. Gajser's practice crash before the Motocross of Nations robbed the Maggiora spectacle of the champion's presence and his nasty-looking accident a week later at the SMX Riders' Cup ruined his goal of contesting the million dollar supercross-motocross hybrid Monster Energy Cup in Las Vegas. Tim came through some prangs relatively unscathed during Grand Prix and seemed to have used all his luck once the MXGP curtain had fallen. With forty motos on the slate for '17 then keeping that same 'elasticity' when it counts will be another prerequisite for remaining at the top.



THE REVELATION OF MXGP: TIM GAJSER





PRODUCTS



LEATT



A bold move from Leatt to dip into the riding gear market but – as usual – the South Africans have done so with a product slightly different and with high performance values. The premium 5.5 jersey and pants have four-way stretching fabric and moisture wicking capabilities as well as air channels. The jersey (75 dollars) is seamless and boasts a lofty level of resistance thanks to the brush guards on the elbows. The pants (180 dollars) have something called an Internal Knee Brace System, which involves four layers of enforcement around the inner knee area and perhaps the area of the product that takes the most abuse. Nanogrip in this section of the pant is also a great idea for wet or dry conditions. Stretchy material, vents and light weight, pre-curved construction are also some of the other essential elements.

The design is simple and not too showy. As a first venture into the gear segment this is a solid effort by Leatt and you can only wonder what little innovations will appear next summer for '18.

www.leatt.com/2017-product-line/







DUCATI XDIAVEL

DUCATI HAVE DROPPED IT DOWN AND SLUNG IT OUT
WITH THE NEW XDIAVEL AND ROLAND TRAVELLED AT THE
ITALIANS' BEHEST TO SEE IF THEY HAVE SUCCESSFULLY
NAILED A CRUISER WORTHY OF THE GENRE LABEL

TRACK- HALTER

By Roland Brown
Photos by Milagro

“Don’t call me a cruiser,” insisted Ducati’s adverts for the Diavel, which brought a new style of laid-back motorcycling to the Italian firm’s range of V-twins back in 2011.

This time it’s different. The Diavel might not have been a cruiser but its follow-up - the XDiavel - surely is. Even if the X in the name is intended to imply that this long, low V-twin is a crossover model, midway between a cruiser and a typical Ducati.

It’s all part of a long-term plan. In 2011, Ducati didn’t feel the world was ready for a cruiser from the marque famed for racy sports bikes, so they went half-way with the Diavel. Five years later, they consider the ground well prepared. “We have been very satisfied with the sales of the Diavel so now we think it’s time for the final step: a real Ducati cruiser,” says product manager Stefano Tarabusi.

Ducati’s design team took the job seriously, decamping to California to ride cruisers, visit biking events and create initial sketches, before fine-tuning the design in Bologna. The result takes Diavel DNA further in all directions, via a 64cc larger-capacity, more flexible but less powerful engine in a longer, lower chassis with a more laid-back riding position.

The 1262cc desmo V-twin engine is designed for low-rev torque and smoothness. Like the Multistrada engine it uses DVT (Desmodromic Variable Timing) to allow more efficient combustion across the rev range. It’s visually cleaner, its water pump hidden in the Vee rather than on the left outside the alternator.

Tuning is revised to give even more emphasis to low-rev performance. Torque output is roughly unchanged from 6-8000rpm, up to 20 per cent stronger below 5000rpm, but weaker above 8000rpm.

Chassis design retains key Ducati elements while pushing things in several directions. The steel trellis frame adds familiarity but kicks the forks out by two degrees to 30 degrees. Chunky aluminium side-plates add rigidity, and hold a braced single-sided aluminium swing-arm, at the end of which spins the large rear sprocket of Ducati’s first belt final drive system.



Styling is another Diavel/cruiser mash-up, blending minimalist seat unit, massive 240-section rear tyre and an exhaust system whose low-slung silencer, largely hidden behind the engine, ends with twin slash-cut outlets.

And this bike is black, very black. The standard XDiavel has a matt finished tank; the more expensive S version combines gloss paintwork with machined engine parts and wheels, plus upgrades including daytime riding lights, Brembo’s M50 monobloc front calipers (borrowed from the 1299 Panigale) and DLC-coated fork stanchions.

DUCATI XDIAVEL





DUCATI XDIAVEL

**“ANY THOUGHT THAT THIS BIKE IS REMOTELY
RESTRAINED OR SENSIBLE DISAPPEARS WHEN
YOU WIND BACK ITS THROTTLE, ESPECIALLY
IN THE MORE AGGRESSIVE SPORT MODE. THE
DUCATI LEAPS FORWARD...”**





TEST



DUCATI XDIAVEL

Even riding the Diavel doesn't prepare you for the XDiavel. By cruiser standards its seat is not particularly low, at 755mm. But it's a strange feeling to sit back, reach over a long petrol tank to a wide, one-piece handlebar, then accelerate away with legs stretched out to forward-set footrests.

At a gentle pace the engine, which gives a choice of three fuel maps, is refined, accelerating from below 4000rpm with a precise throttle response. On the open road the Ducati lopes along smoothly and long-leggedly, its rider's life made easier by the standard-fitment cruise control, if not by the wind-blown riding position.

Any thought that this bike is remotely restrained or sensible disappears when you wind back its throttle, especially in the more aggressive Sport mode. The Ducati leaps forward, lifting its front wheel until the traction control cuts in, and snarling through its exhaust as it rips forward at an arm-yanking rate that plenty of superbikes couldn't match, heading for a top speed of about 150mph.



Thankfully the chassis is perfectly capable of coping, even if your neck muscles aren't. In a straight line the bike is reasonably comfortable, although larger bumps come through the seat with spine-jarring force. On smoother, twisty roads the X-bike is a revelation, cornering with fantastic enthusiasm and control for such a long and laid-back machine.

At almost 250kg with fuel the Ducati is pretty heavy, but it steers accurately and allows respectable lean angles before a boot (heel, not toe) touches down. Brembo's twin front discs give ferocious braking, especially on the S model with its M50 monobloc calipers (which contribute to a higher price: £18,795 against the standard model's £15,995 in the UK).



The XDiavel is even reasonably practical, at least by cruiser standards. Its instrument panel is small but informative; its fuel tank holds a reasonably generous 18 litres, good for over 150 miles. Neat touches include keyless ignition, back-lit switchgear and a separate, larger dual-seat that incorporates a pillion back-rest.

Those features add to the classy feel, and the XDiavel certainly ticks most cruiser boxes, from its long wheelbase, kicked-out forks, low seat, forward-set footrests, fat back tyre and belt final drive to its muscular style and high quality finish. It combines ride-ability and sophistication with outstanding levels of engine and chassis performance.

Cruiser? Crossover? Call it what you like. Either way, the XDiavel marks the point at which Ducati's familiar V-twin fighting spirit meets laid-back cool – and it does a fine job of combining the two.



BARBOUR

The most 'Steve McQueen' element of Barbour's collection is the range of t-shirts that feature the iconic film star in a number of motorcycling illustrations or photographs (mainly based around his 1965 ISDE appearance for Team USA where he actually wore the British brand in the forests of Germany)...the rest of the attire is the definition of smart casual with subtle hints of bikes and even some 1960s style throwback. Here's a snippet of the current range that features almost 30 items from sweatshirts and jackets to accessories. The jerseys cost anywhere between 70-85 pounds and the jackets have a larger margin depending on the construction: the Baffle Quilted Jacket shown here should retail at 160 quid.

We've bought several pieces of Barbour increasingly appealing catalogue and the finish and care behind the garments is first class.

For more info look at: www.barbour.com







BACKPAGE

Monster Energy Girls
By GeeBee Images





'On-track Off-road' is a free, bi-weekly publication for the screen focused on bringing the latest perspectives on events, blogs and some of the very finest photography from the three worlds of the FIM Motocross World Championship, the AMA Motocross and Supercross series' and MotoGP. 'On-track Off-road' will be published online at www.ontrackoffroad.com every other Tuesday. To receive an email notification that a new issue available with a brief description of each edition's contents simply enter an address in the box provided on the homepage. All email addresses will be kept strictly confidential and only used for purposes connected with OTOR.

Adam Wheeler Editor and MXGP/MotoGP correspondent

Ray Archer Photographer

Steve Matthes AMA MX and SX correspondent

Cormac Ryan-Meenan MotoGP Photographer www.cormacgp.com

Simon Cudby AMA SX/MX Photographer

Matthew Roberts Television Presenter and WSB correspondent

Gavin Emmett TV commentator/Presenter and MotoGP Reporter

Núria García Cover Design

Gabi Álvarez Web developer

Hosting FireThumb7 - www.firethumb7.co.uk

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